Table of Contents

1. Part 1
2. Part 2
3. Clan Carols

Part 1

"Hold on... Almost got it!" The She-kit mumbled determinedly, gripping a pinecone in her mouth. She stood on her hind paws, her front paws grasping the leafy wall of the den.

Below her crouched a silvery blue tabby, his little teeth gritted as he struggled to support his sister's weight, equal to his. "Hurry up, will you?" He gasped.

"Almost... There!" She carefully nudged the pinecone between two branches. She paused, leaning back and studying it's placement for a moment before giving a satisfied nod and hopping off of the tabby kit's back.

He quickly straightened and looked up at the pinecone. "Yeah, I like it!"

Bloodfur lay alongside Mistybreeze in their nest, his heart swelling with warmth as he watched his kits admire their work. The red and orange tabby she-kit filled with cheer and energy was Autumnkit. Her quiet and more careful brother was Stormkit.

"I can't believe they're already three moons old," Bloodfur murmured as he turned his gaze to Mistybreeze.

The silver pointed she-cat wore a festive piece of holly by her ear. Her eyes shone with warmth. "Me neither." She paused and let out a purr. "It feels like yesterday you were pacing outside the nursery, waiting for Creamheart to tell you that the kits had arrived."

Bloodfur purred back, however sadness clouded over him as he remembered how afraid he'd been. Throughout Mistybreeze's pregnancy, he'd been haunted by the memory of Poppywing. His mother had bled to death while giving birth to him. He'd been unable to push away his paranoia that Mistybreeze would suffer the same fate. Each moment had felt like torture, only being relieved of it when Creamheart announced that two healthy kits had been

born, and had assured him that Mistybreeze was alright.

"Bloodfur! Mistybreeze!" Autumnkit's cheerful squeak broke him from his thoughts, and he blinked as she and Stormkit bounded up to them, their little tails high in the air. "Is that a good spot for the pinecone?"

"Since the camp is being decorated, we thought the inside of the nursery should be too!" Stormkit added brightly.

Bloodfur's sadness melted away as the kits' eyes shone up at him. *That's over now. Mistybreeze is fine, and we have two perfect kits.*

"That's a perfect place for it," Mistybreeze purred and gave Stormkit's head a lick, while Autumnkit leaped between Bloodfur's front paws and looked up at him eagerly.

Bloodfur lowered his head and touched his nose to her ear. "It looks great," He purred. "You two are going to make the nursery look better than ever this celebration."

Every leaf-bare when the air grew coldest and the snow covered the ground, the clans each held a celebration that lasted a few days. Camps were decorated in pinecones, berries, shells and stones. It was a time of giving thanks to StarClan for the survival of the clans through leaf-bare, and for spending time with loved ones. Each day, the clan would gather and sing songs, share prey, and each cat would talk about the things they were grateful for.

"Well, I see the kits have been hard at work." Came a purr, and he turned to see Bloomfire standing in the entrance of the nursery, her green eyes shining.

"Bloomfire!" The kits scampered over to meet the orange and white warrior as she padded inside. "Look, we've started decorating!"

Bloodfur purred a greeting, blinking fondly at her. "Bloomfire." When his foster mother reached him, she bumped her head affectionately against his, then purred to Mistybreeze before turning to the kits.

"You two must be looking forward to tomorrow," Bloomfire purred

as she sat and curled her tail over her white paws. "It's your very first celebration."

Autumnkit nodded eagerly, her amber eyes bright as she sat in front of her grandmother. "I can't wait!"

"What's the first thing the clan does together?" Stormkit asked curiously, joining his sister. "Is it fun?"

Bloomfire nodded warmly. "Tomorrow the clan will gather and sing songs." She paused, her eyes gleaming teasingly. "I don't suppose you've memorized them already, have you?"

"Yes!" The kits exclaimed at the same time, and beyond them, Bloodfur and Mistybreeze broke into amused chuckling.

"They certainly have!" Bloodfur laughed. "They've been singing them night and day all moon!" He rested his gaze fondly on his mate. "Mistybreeze taught them. She has a beautiful voice."

Mistybreeze gave him an affectionate nudge, her blue eyes warm. "I'm sure you could sing if you tried."

"Err no, I don't think so." Bloodfur ducked his head in embarrassment. "I don't sing."

Bloomfire chuckled, her eyes gleaming. "You sang all the time when you were a kit! I mean, your voice may be a bit deeper now, but..."

She and the kits chuckled, and Bloodfur flattened his ears, his pelt hot with mingled amusement and embarrassment. "Oh, stop that!" He glanced aside to see Mistybreeze holding back laughter. "Hey!"

"I'm sorry love," She chuckled and flicked his shoulder with her tail. "I'd like to hear you sing."

"Yeah!" Autumnkit's ears perked up. "Please, Bloodfur!"

Stormkit stared at him eagerly. "You'd be great, I know it!"

"Not a chance," Bloodfur laughed, and Mistybreeze gave his ear a lick.

"Alright, that's enough of tormenting your father," Bloomfire purred, and the kits reluctantly returned their attention to her. "Why don't we sing a song now to practice for tomorrow?"

Autumnkit brightened. "Yes! Let's sing Deck the Camp! It's my favorite!"

Stormkit's eyes flashed with disappointment. "What about Juniper Berries?"

"We'll do that one after!" She playfully cuffed her brother over the ear.

Bloodfur leaned against Mistybreeze and purred, his embarrassment fading as he watched the kits clear their throats and get ready to sing.

"Deck the camp with frogs and pinecones!" Bloomfire began.

"Fa la la la la, la la la la!" Autumnkit and Stormkit chimed in cheerfully.

"T'is the time for ice and snowstorms!"

"Fa la la la la, la la la la!"

"Holly berries, cardinal feathers!"

"Fa la la la la la, la la la!"

"Thank StarClan for all our blessings!"

"Fa la la la la, la la la la!"

When the kits finished, they broke into laughter, their eyes glowing with joy. Bloomfire joined in, gazing at them fondly.

I'm glad she's so close with Autumnkit and Stormkit. Bloodfur thought as he watched her. His foster mother visited the nursery often when she wasn't needed for her warrior duties. The kits loved to play with her and listen to her stories. It was good for Bloomfire too. She grew lonesome sometimes without her mate, Flameheart, who had

died in battle with Deserve's Army moons ago. Bloodfur was fully grown now, as well as her own kits, Heatstorm, Applefall, and Foxflower. Autumnkit and Stormkit reminded her that she was still needed. And she loved kits.

"Can we sing Juniper Berries now?" Stormkit urged, staring up at Bloomfire.

The orange and white warrior purred. "Of c-"

"Stormkit! Look!" Autumnkit gasped and dashed to the entrance of the nursery, her orange striped tail raised excitedly. "It's snowing!"

"Really? Let me see!" As Stormkit hurried to her side, Bloodfur and Mistybreeze rose to their paws and joined them, looking out into the white clearing.

The entire camp was blanketed in clouds of snow. Every cat seemed busy doing something. The clan deputy, Cobratail, was speaking with Cliffshade, who trudged through snow up to his belly.

"Cliffshade, why don't you help decorate the elders den?" Cobratail prompted.

The gray and brown warrior shook his head. "I'm busy clearing a path to the apprentices den." He told him bluntly.

"Yes, well... There are no apprentices." The clan deputy reminded him, looking puzzled. "Not until your kits are apprenticed. Why don't you help decorate like every other cat?"

"Ha!" Cliffshade snorted and shook snow from his fur. "You've all got bees in your brains, making the camp look pretty while there's work to be done." He narrowed his eyes. "Leaf-bare isn't over yet. We need to-"

Ebonystripe rushed over and gave her father a playful nudge. "Come on, Cliffshade! Greenpine really wants you to help decorate that tree by the nursery. Smokekit and Jadekit too. She says that if you don't..." She paused and narrowed her green eyes, repeating her mother's threat word for word. "She will sing Deck the Camp to you until your ears fall off that thick head of yours."

For a moment, Cliffshade silently stared at her daughter, one eye twitching slightly. Then, he huffed out a sigh. "Fine, fine..." He reluctantly turned and followed her across the clearing.

"Wow! Look at the warriors den!" Autumnkit exclaimed, pointing toward it with her paw.

Bloodfur followed her gaze and saw that the den was decorated with holly berries, pinecones, squirrel tails and dark feathers. Applefall passed a pawful of holly berries to Tinylark, who carefully stuck them onto thorns and branches. On the other side of the den, Coldpebble was nudging a pinecone into place.

Foxflower and Spiderfang bounded across the clearing together, carrying a string of squirrel tails. They stopped by Depthstar's den, and the clan leader stepped outside, letting out a purr. "What's this?"

"Decorations for your den!" Foxflower purred. "You'll need to be ready for tomorrow too."

Beside her, Spiderfang nodded. "And we'll be right back with some holly!"

Depthstar purred, his blue eyes shining. "Thanks you two."

As the young warriors hurried off to fetch the berries, Bloodfur saw Boost and Heatstorm working on the elders den.

"Juniper berries, juniper berries, juniper all the way!" Boost sang cheerfully as he placed feathers around the elders den.

Beside him, Heatstorm shot him a glare. "I swear to StarClan, if you sing that song one more time, I'll follow you all day throwing snowballs at your head!"

"It's a good song though!"

As the warriors argued, Heatstorm's words triggered a memory in Bloodfur's mind. He was a tiny kit, fearing he would never be made a warrior by Depthstar. His good friend Swiftstalker, Swiftkit then, had comforted him. *"Of course he will! And if he's mouse brained*

enough not to, I'll follow him all day throwing moss balls at that big furry head of his." The memory warmed him for a moment, but it wasn't long before sorrow overthrew it. *I miss him... He should be here.*

"Bloodfur?"

"Hmm?" He snapped out of his thoughts, startled to see Mistybreeze, Bloomfire, and the kits staring at him in concern. *Did I say something out loud?* He wondered.

"We wanted to go play in the snow." Stormkit tilted his head. "Mistybreeze asked if you'd come with us."

How did I not hear that? Bloodfur thought in embarrassment. He gave himself a shake. "Err, yeah, of course." He was surprised to hear his own voice crack.

Bloomfire studied him in concern for a moment. "I'll go with the kits," She told him. She exchanged a look with Mistybreeze, as though silently urging her to comfort her son, then followed Autumnkit and Stormkit into the clearing.

"Stay with Bloomfire, and don't be long! You'll catch a cold!" Mistybreeze called after them worriedly.

As the kits joyfully bounded away into the snow, she turned her concerned gaze to Bloodfur. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head and sat down, suddenly overcome with sadness. She leaned against him and wrapped her tail around him. "This is a hard time for you, isn't it?" She murmured.

Bloodfur knew she was right. He dropped his gaze. The celebration was all about spending time with loved ones. And he had lost so many since last leaf-bare. *Cardinalpaw... Flameheart... Swiftstalker...* Three cats who had meant so much to him. Even his biological parents, Rainheart and Poppywing, were not with them.

Mistybreeze seemed to know exactly what he was thinking. She knew him too well. "I miss Diamondrain all the time," She meowed quietly. "Even Crowmask, though we were never close. He was still

my father. We've all lost loved ones."

"Too many," Bloodfur murmured, closing his eyes and shaking his head. *How can StarClan be so cruel? Who would want to take so much from us?*

"My pads are frozen!" Autumnkit's squeak caught his attention, and his eyes flashed up, worried that she was in distress.

"Now now, they aren't frozen! Just a bit numb." Bloomfire gently lifted her by her scruff. "Let's go back inside where it's warm."

Stormkit hurried after her. "Aww!"

Mistybreeze watched them as they entered the nursery, then returned her attention to her mate. "It helps to think of the good memories, Bloodfur." She told him gently. "When I was a kit during the leaf-bare celebration, Diamondrain would tell silly stories to me and Coldpebble, about cats made of snow, granting wishes to all the good kits."

Bloodfur let out an amused purr. "I remember that tale." He paused, a soft purr rumbling in his throat as he drifted into his memories. "During the celebration, Flameheart and Bloomfire brought me a cardinal feather. It was so red and vibrant, it amazed me! It was a special gift to me. I kept that feather hidden in my nest until I was apprenticed."

"Whoa..!" Autumnkit stared at him, her amber eyes filled with wonder. "A red feather?"

Stormkit looked shocked. "I didn't know there were red birds!"

"There are," Bloodfur told them with a purr. "They're called cardinals. It's rare to see one, but they make nests in the trees during leaf-bare."

His kits stared up at him in awe. "Wow! They sound amazing!" Autumnkit breathed. "I'd love to have one of those feathers."

"Me too!" Stormkit agreed brightly. "It would make the celebration better than ever!"

Mistybreeze let out a purr and crouched to nuzzle each kit. "I'm sorry kits, but no cat has caught a cardinal in moons. Like your father said, they're rare."

"Aww..." The kits' tails drooped.

Bloodfur stared at his kits, his heart aching to see them so disappointed. An idea flashed in his mind, like sunshine peering out from behind a wall of clouds. *I'll make this the best celebration they can imagine!* He stood. "Just a moment. Just because cardinals are rare doesn't mean they can't be found."

"Bloodfur?" Mistybreeze blinked at him in confusion.

"I want to make this celebration extra special for you," Bloodfur meowed, his heart warm as the kits stared up at him. "I'm going to go find you each your very own cardinal feather."

"Really?" Stormkit gasped.

Autumnkit's eyes were lit with excitement. "You promise?"

"I promise." Bloodfur purred and nuzzled her, then rasped his tongue over Stormkit's head. "I'll go right now and be back as soon as I can."

"Yay!" Autumnkit squeaked and tackled her brother. "I'll get the biggest feather!"

"Will not!"

"Will too!"

As the kits argued playfully, Mistybreeze leaned close to him, whispering in his ear. "Are you sure you can do this..? It's nearly sundown. How will you find a feather by tomorrow?"

"I will, Mistybreeze," Bloodfur assured her. "I want to make the kits happy. The cardinal feather was special to me as a kit. I want it to be special for them too."

Mistybreeze's blue eyes were filled with concern. "Alright... Just be

careful." She touched her nose to his, and he purred loudly.

"Kits! Why don't you two stop bickering and decorate the other side of the den while your father is busy?" Bloomfire suggested, waving her tail.

The kits paused, and Stormkit frowned. "But we don't have any more decorations."

"I know!" Autumnkit perked up. "Let's ask Creamheart if we can have some of those blue berries in her den!" She spun and took off, Stormkit following.

"Don't take juniper berries without Creamheart's permission!" Bloomfire called after them. "She might need them if some cat gets sick!" She shook her head in amusement and looked at Bloodfur. "Are you sure about this?"

He nodded. "I'm finding those feathers. They deserve something special." He dipped his head. "I'll be back before dark."

After Mistybreeze and Bloomfire said goodbye and wished him luck, he hurried across the clearing toward the thorn tunnel.

"Bloodfur?"

He paused and turned to see Cobratail padding through the snow toward him. "Where are you going?"

Bloodfur quickly explained how his parents had brought him a cardinal feather when he was a kit. "I want to do the same for my kits." He meowed.

Cobratail's tail twitched. "I'm not sure how much luck you'll have. But I hope you find one." He glanced up. "It looks like another snowstorm is on the way. You don't want to be caught in it."

He lifted his gaze and saw the clouded sky darkening. It was definitely going to snow. "I'll be back before it arrives," He told the deputy. After he dipped his head, Bloodfur continued through the thorn tunnel.

I'm going to bring back a cardinal feather for the kits. He thought determinedly. He could already see the joy on their faces when he returned to the nursery with the bright red feathers, fascinating them the same way they had fascinated him as a kit. *This will be the best celebration ever!*

Part 2

The snow crunched softly under Bloodfur's paws as he stepped through the forest. For a long time, he kept his head raised, keeping his eyes peeled for a red bird among the branches above him. But his neck quickly got sore, and he proceeded to only look up occasionally.

The forest was very silent in leaf-bare. Most prey was hibernating or sheltering in burrows, and the birds rarely chirped. Few patrols were out today, as the clans were all preparing for their celebrations. The world was white, still, and silent around him.

Well, it should be easy enough to see a cardinal when everything else is white and brown. Bloodfur thought. He couldn't wait to get those feathers for Autumnkit and Stormkit. He wondered if they would react to them the same way he had...

"Look, Bloodkit!" Bloomfire purred. "Flameheart has returned. And what's that he's got?"

Flameheart stepped into the nursery, holding a bright red feather in his teeth. As Bloodkit gasped, his father crouched and gently dropped it in front of him. "This is a cardinal feather, Bloodkit. It's a special gift, just for you."

"Wow!" Bloodkit breathed, gently dabbing at the feather with his paw. "It's so pretty!" He carefully picked it up by the stem with his teeth, waving it around.

Flameheart laughed, his eyes shining with love and happiness as he watched him. "I hoped you'd like it. It's for the celebration."

"I love it!" Bloodkit set down the feather and rubbed his cheek against its soft edges. "I'll remember it forever!"

Bloodfur's heart swelled with warmth at the memory. *They'll love it too. I know they will. I-*

Flapping above his head snapped him out of his thoughts, and he froze and arched his back, bristling instinctively. A thrush had flown over a branch above him and perched on it, carrying twigs for its nest.

Bloodfur relaxed, but couldn't hide his disappointment. *If only it had been a cardinal! I guess it won't be that easy though.* As he continued through the trees, he began to wonder if Flameheart had struggled to find this bird as well. *How long did he search for a feather for me?* He wondered. *Did he have more time than I have?* He let out a sigh. *If only Flameheart were here... Maybe he could help me.*

He gave his head a shake. *If Flameheart could do it alone, I can too... I can prove I'm a great father, just like he was.*

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The sky grew darker above Bloodfur, and he knew the sun was setting behind the veil of clouds. A light snowfall descended from overhead, dappling his dark red tabby fur in white. *Great, it's only going to get darker, and the snow will pick up...* He let out a sigh and shivered, shaking snowflakes from his pelt. *I've checked the east side of the territory. I'll just have to go west now.*

As he changed direction, he remembered a snowy night, a bit like this one. One that he had shared with his friend, Swiftstalker.

Bloodkit lay curled up against Bloomfire's warm fur. He opened his eyes and stared across the nursery sadly. Poisonedsap was curled up in her nest, sound asleep. Stonekit dozed alongside her. About a fox length away from her, Swiftkit lay curled in a ball, whimpering quietly in his sleep.

Earlier that day, Poisonedsap had yelled at Swiftkit for his poor battle skills. He was no match for Stonekit. Bloodkit felt horrible for his friend and wished he could make him feel better.

Bloodkit hesitantly crept out of his nest and padded to his side.

"Swiftkit?" He whispered. When his friend didn't respond and only trembled, he added, "Are you okay?"

"No..." Swiftkit rasped, burying his face in his paws. "I don't want to fight anymore... I don't want to get hurt anymore."

Bloodkit's heart throbbed. He looked at his paws and thought for a moment. Then, he quickly turned back to his nest, picking out his cardinal feather. He returned to Swiftkit and dropped it in front of him.

Swiftkit opened his eyes slightly and sniffled. "What...?"

"It always makes me feel better, when cats look at me strangely," Bloodkit murmured, nudging the feather toward him with his nose. "Maybe it'll help you too."

"But..." Swiftkit stared at it. "You love that feather."

Bloodkit nodded. He felt saddened at the thought of giving up the feather. But Swiftkit needed it more than he did. "You'll love it too."

Swiftkit stared at him for a moment, then let out a small purr. "Thanks, Bloodkit." He pulled the feather close with his white paw and nuzzled it, closing his eyes.

After a moment, Bloodkit returned to his nest, settling against Bloomfire. He watched his friend for a moment, warmth blazing through him. I did the right thing. He closed his eyes, happily drifting off to sleep.

Swiftstalker kept that feather until he was apprenticed. Bloodfur thought as he studied the trees above him. *Then I had it. It must have gotten lost somewhere after that. But-* A heavy gust of wind nearly knocked him off his paws, blowing snow into his face. He coughed and shut his eyes.

The sky was dark now, and the storm had arrived. Snow whirled around him in thick flurries, limiting his view of the world around him. His paws felt numb, and he stumbled forward, lifting his head and squinting as snowflakes rushed at him in swift clusters.

Oh, StarClan! There's no way I can find a cardinal now! Just as he was about to accept his failure, something red flashed in the corner of

his eye. He jerked his head up and gasped, inhaling cold air and flurries.

Cardinal!

The red bird struggled against the wind as it flapped onward madly, and Bloodfur gave chase. *I can't lose it!* He followed the cardinal through the snowstorm, struggling to keep his eyes open despite the snow rushing into them, pushing against the fierce wind.

A cold gust slammed at his face, and he instinctively turned his head, gasping for air. When he looked back up, his heart skipped a beat. *No!* The cardinal was gone. He looked around desperately as he was attacked by the raging wind and snow. He knew he was in the marsh now. *Come on, where are you?*

He looked up desperately and froze when he caught sight of the bird perched in a tree, struggling to get to its nest, which looked like it might blow away at any moment.

Without another thought, Bloodfur grunted and leaped at the tree, digging his claws into the cold bark. He climbed as the snow ruffled his fur and pulled himself up onto the branch, which swayed under him in the wind. He huffed in a breath and gripped the bark under him, looking up sharply.

To his astonishment, the cardinal didn't notice him. *It must be too distracted by the storm!* He gritted his teeth and made a tiny leap, grasping the cardinal in his claws. It let out an alarmed shriek and struggled in his grip.

It's okay, I just need a couple feathers! Bloodfur thought as he held the bird's wings down and carefully plucked a couple of the bright red feathers. He then released the cardinal, and it immediately took off into the storm.

Bloodfur gripped the feathers tightly between his teeth, satisfaction blazing through him. *I did it! I got the feathers! Autumnkit and Stormkit will be so-*

Another gust of wind slammed into him, harder than before. He

started to sink his claws into the branch, but he was too late. He let out a shriek through gritted teeth as he was knocked off the branch and sent plummeting downward. His back collided with a hard surface that cracked under his weight, and the next thing he knew, he was engulfed in freezing, dark water.

The marsh! Cold shock and terror bolted through his body. *I fell through the ice!* He instinctively opened his jaws to yowl, only to send icy water flooding into his mouth. The red feathers drifted away. *No!* He tried to reach for the feathers, but they were too far away now and vanished into the dark depths. The movement caused him to drift upward, and he desperately waved his legs around. He was surprised to feel his hind paws touch a hard surface. *It's not that deep!* He pushed upward and sloppily swam toward the surface.

Bloodfur's head shot out of the water, and he gasped in air that was no warmer than the water below. He panted as he scrabbled at the icy surface, pulling his body out of the water. *Oh StarClan!* Icy water soaked his pelt, his fur slicked tight to his body. Freezing gusts of wind and snow only worstened his ordeal, chilling him to the bone.

I've never been so cold... He moaned and collapsed into the snow, trembling uncontrollably. His bones ached as searing cold numbed his entire body. *This is it... I'm going to freeze to death...* He shut his frosty eyelids, giving in to the storm.

"Bloodfur."

He heard the voice faintly under the howling wind, but didn't move. Couldn't move. *It's my imagination... I'm alone.*

"Bloodfur, get up!"

The voice hissed right in his ear, and his heart skipped a beat as he recognized it. *Swiftstalker...?* He shakily opened his snowflake flecked eyelids. A familiar black and white tom crouched beside him, his fur glittering with starlight. The snowstorm raged on behind him, but he seemed unaware and immune to its forces. His glowing blue eyes were locked on his, filled with alarm and

frustration.

"S-Swiftstalker..." He mumbled. "A-are you h-here to t-t-take me to S-StarClan...?"

"No, you mouse brain!" Swiftstalker snapped. "It's not your time to die. Get up!"

Bloodfur stared at his old friend for a moment, then slowly let his eyes closed, giving in to his numb and freezing demise. *I can't move... I can't think...*

"Bloodfur! I said get up!" His friend hissed at him urgently. "Mistybreeze is waiting for you. Your kits are waiting for you."

Mistybreeze... Autumnkit... Stormkit... Bloodfur slowly opened his eyes again. Swiftstalker was gone, and he was alone in the storm once again. With a surge of determination, he rose to his paws on trembling, numb legs, stumbling forward. *Come on... I have to get back to camp. I have to get back to my family.*

"Bloodfur!"

Mistybreeze? He raised his head shakily, squinting. The silver she-cat was racing toward him through the snow, her eyes lit with fear. She was followed by Cobratail and Applefall.

He'd never been so relieved. He trembled as they reached him, and Mistybreeze pressed against his side, gasping. "Bloodfur, what happened? Oh, StarClan!"

As Applefall rushed to his other side, Cobratail raised his voice above the wind. "Keep him warm! We have to get him to Creamheart right away!"

Cobratail led the way, shielding Bloodfur from the wind while Mistybreeze and Applefall pressed on either side of him to keep him warm. He felt numb and freezing cold to the bone. But he was comforted knowing he was heading home, flanked by his mate and foster sister. *I'll be okay... I have to be.*

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The walk back to camp warmed Bloodfur up and made him feel more conscious. When they padded through the thorn tunnel, many cats looked toward him in alarm.

Creamheart raced out of her den to meet him. "Come on, get him inside," She ordered, and Mistybreeze and Applefall continued guiding him toward the medicine den.

"Look, there he is! Bloodfur!" Autumnkit shrieked from the nursery.

Bloodfur looked aside numbly as she and Stormkit raced over, their eyes round with fear. *I failed them... How am I going to tell them?* He couldn't bear the thought, but knew there was no avoiding it.

"Will he be okay?" Autumnkit wailed, staring after him.

"He's freezing!" Stormkit added in a cry.

Bloomfire quickly joined them and pulled them close with her tail. "Bloodfur will be alright, he's just cold." She tried to sound calm, but her eyes were alight with fear.

Creamheart led them into the medicine den and gestured toward an empty nest. "Lay down, Bloodfur. Mistybreeze, Applefall, lick his fur the wrong way to warm him up." As the she-cats crouched beside him, she began pawing together some herbs.

As Mistybreeze and Applefall lapped at his snowy fur, he slowly relaxed, their comforting licks warming his shivering body.

The medicine cat crouched and nudged some thyme toward his muzzle. "Eat this, it will ease your shock."

Bloodfur slowly lapped up the herb, grimacing at the taste, but taking it over freezing to death anytime. He let out a sigh and closed his eyes, resting his chin on the moss as Mistybreeze and Applefall continued licking his fur dry.

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It wasn't long before Bloodfur felt warmer and back to a healthy temperature. *Thank StarClan Mistybreeze, Applefall, and Cobratail*

found me... And thank StarClan for Swiftstalker. Without his old friend's encouragement, he might have given in to his demise right then and there.

"Bloodfur?" Autumnkit and Stormkit cautiously padded into the den, staring at their father anxiously. Bloomfire followed, looking relieved to see Bloodfur in stable condition.

He raised his head from the nest and stared at his kits, his heart aching as he waited for them to ask where the feathers were. *It's time... As if this night couldn't get any worse!* "Autumnkit... Stormkit..." He rasped. "I'm sorry."

"Sorry?" Stormkit blinked. "What for?"

"I..." Bloodfur forced himself to meet their wide, anxious eyes that were about to be filled with disappointment. "I couldn't get you the cardinal feathers. I'm so sorry. I tried my best, but-"

"Feathers?" Autumnkit looked surprised, exchanging a look with Stormkit. "We forgot all about them."

What? Bloodfur stared at them in disbelief, and Stormkit's round blue eyes rose to him, glistening with fear. "You said you'd be back before dark, and you weren't... We got scared."

"Scared you wouldn't be here for the celebration, or... or anything..." Autumnkit's tail drooped. "Mistybreeze was scared too. So she went to find you."

Bloodfur's heart grew heavy with guilt. He looked beside him at Mistybreeze and saw her eyes filled with emotion. "When I saw you out there in the cold, I..." She shut her eyes and leaned against him. "I'm so glad you're alright."

"I'm so sorry kits..." Bloodfur murmured. "I just wanted to get those feathers for you. So you'd have a special gift."

Autumnkit's eyes shone. "We already have a special gift. You." She touched her nose to his, and his heart melted.

"We don't need red feathers to make the celebration the best! We

need you and Mistybreeze." Stormkit added with a purr, nuzzling Bloodfur's cheek.

"Right! Being together is what the celebration is about, isn't it?" Autumnkit prompted brightly. "And now we're all together!"

Bloodfur stared at his kits, overwhelmed with emotion. They truly didn't care that he'd failed to bring them cardinal feathers. All that mattered to them was that he was home with the family. "I'm so proud of you..." He purred softly, touched at their words. "I was so sure you'd be upset with me."

"We love you, Bloodfur. More than anything, especially some feathers." Mistybreeze purred and licked his ear. "You're a great father. No other cat would have gone to such lengths to make their kits happy."

"Yes," Bloomfire agreed, her eyes warm. "Flameheart would be so proud of you."

Bloodfur leaned against Mistybreeze, and the kits climbed into the nest with them, happily snuggling against them. "I love you all too," He purred.

Creamheart watched them from a distance, her blue eyes warm. "If you feel well enough, you're free to go back to your nest in the nursery."

"That sounds nice." Bloodfur rose to his paws as his family leaned away from him and stood. "Thanks, Creamheart."

The creamy tabby she-cat dipped her head. "Of course. Just don't go on any life threatening feather missions again, okay?" Her eyes gleamed.

"I won't," Bloodfur purred, looking down. Autumnkit and Stormkit gazed up at him happily. "Everything we need for the celebration is right here."

Snowflakes drifted gently from the night sky, adding to the blanket of snow in the clearing. The kits bounded out of the den, and Autumnkit looked over her shoulder. "We did more decorating

while you were gone! Hurry and see!"

As she and Stormkit raced ahead, Bloodfur purred and sat down, letting his gaze drift across the camp. It was beautiful. The other cats were asleep in their dens. The clearing was still and silent as snowflakes softly drifted down to join the settled snow. Each den was decorated in pinecones and berries, which were now dappled in white frost due to the fresh snowfall.

Bloodfur drew in a breath of cool air and raised his head to the stars, snowflakes drifting onto his face. But he didn't mind. It felt... nice. Relaxing even. Mistybreeze sat beside him and followed his gaze. "Silent nights like these are the best, aren't they?"

"Yes," He agreed warmly, leaning into her warm fur. "It's the-"

"Whoa! I don't believe it!"

"Look!"

He and Mistybreeze turned quickly at the kits' surprised squeaks. *What's going on?* They turned away from the snowy clearing and ducked into the nursery. Bloodfur drew in a sharp breath of shock as he took in what awaited them.

Autumnkit and Stormkit were crouched by their nest, staring in front of them excitedly. Rested in the moss were two bright red cardinal feathers. "Wow, you were right, Bloodfur!" Stormkit exclaimed, reaching out to stroke one feather with his paw. "It's really red!"

"It's amazing!" Autumnkit purred, her eyes lit with delight as she nuzzled the other feather. "I thought you said you couldn't find them?"

Bloodfur stared at the feathers in amazement. "I... I didn't..." He exchanged an astonished look with Mistybreeze. "Did you-"

She shook her head, her blue eyes filled with warmth and disbelief. "How did they get here?" She whispered.

As Bloodfur stared at the feathers, searching for an explanation,

something glimmered behind the nest. For a heartbeat, he thought snowflakes were falling through a hole in the den roof. But suddenly the starlit form of a cat appeared. Swiftstalker's blue eyes gleamed at Bloodfur before he faded away.

Mistybreeze nor the kits reacted to the StarClan warrior's presence, and Bloodfur knew that he had been the only one to see him. He leaned into Mistybreeze and purred softly. "It was Swiftstalker," He murmured.

The silver she-cat looked at him like he was crazy, her eyes puzzled. "Swiftstalker?" She echoed.

"Swiftstalker brought the feathers for the kits." Even without the confirmation, it was easy to believe. Swiftstalker cared deeply for both Bloodfur and Mistybreeze. *Of course he would watch over our kits. Of course he would do something like this for us.*

Mistybreeze stared at him for a long moment, her eyes clouding with emotion as she shared his thoughts. "Of course he would," She murmured, resting her warm gaze on the kits. After a moment, she purred. "You two had better get to sleep soon. You have a big day tomorrow."

Autumnkit grasped the base of her feather in her paws, looking up at her parents while Stormkit rubbed his muzzle against his feather. "Aww! Can we sleep with our feathers?"

"Of course," Bloodfur purred. "Just don't tickle us in our sleep!"

The kits chuckled, and Stormkit spoke up. "Can we sing a song before we sleep?"

Mistybreeze hesitated, exchanging a look with Bloodfur. "It's so late already..."

"Pleeeeeaaaasssseeee!" The kits stared up at them hopefully, grinning with little white teeth.

"Alright," She purred. "But Greenpine and her kits are already asleep, so we must sing softly." She looked down at the kits thoughtfully for a moment, then began. "Silent night, StarClan's

night."

"All is calm, all is bright." Autumnkit and Stormkit chimed in with their mother.

Bloodfur gazed at his family as they sang quietly in the night. It was a beautiful moment, one that he couldn't resist participating in. "Round your family, queens, and kittens," He joined in softly.

"Holy kittens, so tender and mild." Mistybreeze met his gaze affectionately as she went on.

"Sleep in StarClanly peace," They continued singing softly into the cozy darkness of the nursery. As Mistybreeze leaned against him, he closed his eyes and rested his cheek against her head. Autumnkit and Stormkit sat between their paws, holding their feathers under them as they caroled.

Bloodfur gazed out into the clearing, watching the snowflakes slowly and silently fall as he murmured the last of the lyrics with his family. "Sleep in StarClanly peace..."

~The End~

Happy holidays to everyone from Shadows of Blood!

Clan Carols

Deck the Camp

Deck the camp with frogs and pinecones
Fa la la la la, la la la la (fa la la la la, la la la la)
Tis the time for ice and snowstorms
Fa la la la la, la la la la (fa la la la la, la la la la)

Holly berries, Cardinal feathers
Fa la la la la, la la la la (fa la la la la, la la la la)
Thank StarClan for all our blessings
Fa la la la la, la la la la

Juniper Berries

Dashing through the snow
On patrol with friends today
Along the borders we go
Marking all the way

The kits begin to sing

Making spirits bright
What fun it is to walk and sing a jolly song tonight

Juniper berries, juniper berries
Juniper all the way
Oh what fun they are to pick
for our medicine cat today, hey

Juniper berries, juniper berries
Juniper all the way
Oh what fun they are to pick
for our medicine cat today

Silent Night

Silent night, StarClan's night
All is calm, all is bright
Round your family, queens, and kittens
Holy kittens, so tender and mild
Sleep in StarClanly peace
Sleep in StarClanly peace

Bloodfur the Red Furred Warrior

You know Depthstar and Flameheart and Rainheart and
BloomfireCliffshade and Creamheart and Iceslide and Crowmask
But do you recall
The most famous warrior of all?

Bloodfur the red furred warrior
Had a very reddish pelt
And if you ever saw it
You would think it meant bad luck

All of the other apprentices
Used to laugh and call him names
They never let poor Bloodfur
Join in any warrior games

Then one night when rogues attacked

Depthstar came to say
Bloodfur, with your heart so right
Won't you save the clans tonight?"

Then how the warriors loved him
As they shouted out with glee
Bloodfur the red furred warrior
You'll go down in history"

Swiftstalker Is Coming To Camp

You better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why

Swiftstalker is coming to camp

He's making a list
He's checking it twice
He's gonna find out who's naughty or nice
Swiftstalker is coming to camp

He sees you when you're sleeping
he knows when you're awake
He knows if you've been bad or good
So be good for StarClan's sakeYou better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why
Swiftstalker is coming to camp